

III. Local Level Institution of Participation in a Changing Political and Economic Environment: The Kenyan Experience Comments

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C O M M E N T

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In this project on African Political Economy in Transition, I am in charge of the case of Kenya. While my main concern is on political history at national level, Dr. Alila puts stress on local level institutions. So Dr. Alila's point of view is very stimulating to me and his paper is very much informative about local level institutions of participation.

I would like to comment on three points. First, Dr. Alila emphasizes the importance of grass-roots participation to make rural development programs successful and shows the examples of failures of top-down systems: harambee self-help activities, the large scale Bura Irrigation Scheme, etc. But I think that showing the examples of failure only is not sufficient to make his assertion convincing. He should show some cases with bottom-up institutions that succeeded in rural development. Then, I would like to know what important roles the bottom-up institutions played in those successful cases. I think there might be many factors behind the success, like financial support, initial condition, climate, etc. But if some examples tell us that the grass-roots participation was indispensable to their success, then his argument would be fortified.

Let me turn to the next question. I would like to ask him what is the necessary condition for building institutions with genuine participation. I agree to his proposition that no single form of institution can be presumed to be good for all circumstances. But in his paper, it seems to me that Dr. Alila puts stress on the decentralization as a minimum condition. Is the decentralization, generally speaking, a necessary condition for building institutions

with participation?

My last comment is about the relation between local level institution building and "National Development" (p.8). Although he insists that rural development should be seen in terms of its contribution towards National Development, isn't there high possibility that local level institution-building of participation becomes an obstacle to National Development? Kenya seems to be, firstly, still on the way to create her national integration because of the social diversity and the colonial experience. So I think that it is very hard to decentralize Kenyan political economy system, which Dr. Alila mentions as an important process for local level institution building, without disturbing its struggle for achieving national integration. Secondly, when one refers to 'local', 'rural' or 'small-scale' in Kenya, most of those units would be within a ethnic boundary. That is to say, local level institution building does not tend to go beyond each ethnic group. Thirdly, and related to the second point, I heard that the current political liberalization of introducing a multi-party system has been, unfortunately, generating ethno-centrism. As he points out, decentralization would be one of the key bases for accomplishing rural development with genuine participation. But under such situation, there is a danger that the local level institutionalization would risk the national level development.